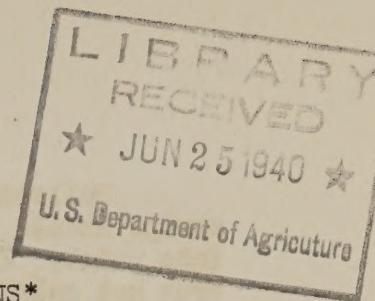


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COOPERATIVE PRODUCTION OF EXTENSION BULLETINS\*

By

Harold E. Pinches, Extension Agricultural Engineer  
University of Connecticut  
Storrs, Connecticut

One of the persistent problems in agricultural engineering extension is to provide bulletin and circular material on a variety of subjects. The number of subjects is so large that if bulletins or circulars were prepared on each and were kept up to date, they would have to be done very hastily with considerable sacrifice in quality and comprehensiveness. If time is taken to do a good job on a few, many subjects remain to be covered.

This problem is especially acute in any State where only one or two specialists are working on agricultural engineering extension. However, the field is so broad that it would take a large staff with considerable time free for writing to cover all the needs for this sort of material.

The farm buildings plan service suggests a method of solution. All the States participating in such a plan service (at least in the Northeast) now have a better plan service than any State had previously. This is due to pooling the material which each had developed separately and, out of that, assembling a complete set of plans generally acceptable. In the process of selection and revision, the final set of plans received the criticism of several experienced agricultural engineers and were considerably improved in detail. What is perhaps more important, the process of selection and revision eliminated undesirable features and made each plan highly dependable through the criticism and scrutiny to which each was subjected.

It seems possible that a similar scheme could be developed for the preparation of bulletin material which would be well written, well illustrated, technically dependable, and complete in coverage of the subject. The basic idea behind this proposal is that few subjects in agricultural engineering are limited by State lines. There may be differences, for example, in the type of potato storage needed in northern Maine as compared with southern Maryland. In such cases regional bulletins might not be satisfactory. But for a great variety of subjects such as water supply, sewage disposal, paints and painting, and many of the uses of electricity on the farm, the relationships are limited by physical laws which do not vary throughout the Northeast region.

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Bulletins that are well written cannot be done hastily. Any manuscript should be written, revised, and allowed to season before being put into print. It takes time and money to get good illustrations. This is true not only for photographic illustrations but especially so for line drawings. With regard to technical dependability and completeness of coverage of the subject, there are only two or three agricultural engineers in the Northeast who are more than passably qualified to write on any one subject. Each man has a rather narrow field in which he is best qualified by training, interest, or experience. However, under the present system many extension specialists are attempting to turn out bulletins on a large variety of subjects and are doing so under considerable pressure for time.

Putting together the various factors discussed above, it is proposed that an attempt be made to develop a system under which any subject not obviously limited by special considerations to one State should be "farmed out" to the one or two men in the region best qualified to write on that subject. Other specialists would then concentrate, likewise, on other subjects. The products of such individual concentration should then be made available to all other colleges in the region for which the system was devised.

There is something to be said for each specialist attempting to write his own bulletins. The preparation of a bulletin results in a considerable degree of education of the author, making him more competent in the field of that subject thereafter. However, it should be remembered that bulletins are supposed to be teaching material in their own right; hence the purpose for which a bulletin is prepared is for the education of the reader, not of the author.

The machinery or procedure for operating such a scheme would probably not need to be so formal as that necessary for the development of a farm buildings plan service. The minimum requirements would be some system for sending to other extension engineers some such announcements as the following: "We intend to write on (name of subject). The enclosed outline indicates the general development we plan to follow. Will you comment on our outline and indicate where it does not meet your needs? Do you have illustrative material that would aid in this preparation? Are you interested in helping actively in the preparation of this particular bulletin?"

Some such procedure as the above should eliminate duplication of time and effort. It should also concentrate the attention of more than one man on the subject at a particular time.

After a bulletin was prepared to the satisfaction of the author or authors, it would then be necessary to make it available to other States which might be interested in obtaining a supply. One way this could be done would be to make advance copies available far enough ahead to permit any other interested State to put its order in with the printer, thus securing the lower costs of large printings. The problem of sharing costs

probably has administrative relationships which would have to be worked out by the State extension directors. The authorship of the manuscript should be clearly stated. Whether or not the bulletin as used in any State would bear the cover and title page customary in that State or (the cheaper method) use the cover and title page of the initiating college, would depend on the editorial policy of the college concerned.

One objection which might appear, at first glance, would be that the schools with the larger staffs probably would contribute more bulletins than those with smaller staffs. However, it is to be expected that each would contribute in proportion to its number of extension specialists. Under the present system the larger schools already have developed more and, in general, better bulletins (in agricultural engineering) than the smaller schools.

The value of this method of preparing bulletins has been demonstrated already in an informal way in Connecticut. Two or three years ago a bulletin was prepared in New Hampshire on electric burglar alarms. At the time, poultry stealing was prevalent in Connecticut. It was recognized that the information presented in the New Hampshire bulletin on burglar alarms could be of very real use to Connecticut poultrymen. Accordingly, several hundred copies of this bulletin were procured from New Hampshire and made freely available to Connecticut poultrymen. A little later it became apparent that there was need for a small supply (at most a few hundred copies) of a bulletin on common storage of apples. To treat this subject adequately would have required a great deal of time and the writing of a bulletin of more than the usual number of pages. Such a bulletin had recently been published by Cornell University. Consequently, arrangements were made for the necessary copies to be obtained from Cornell, thus leaving the time of the specialist in Connecticut free for other work. At about the same time, need also arose for a bulletin on cold storage of apples. This subject involves even more comprehensive treatment than common storage, and yet the number of persons desiring a bulletin would be even smaller. It was known that such a bulletin was being developed jointly by the agricultural engineers and fruit specialists at Massachusetts State College. Conferences were held with those involved at Massachusetts State College, and an agreement was reached to contribute some aid in the preparation of the Massachusetts bulletin. The agricultural engineering specialist from Connecticut contributed data which he had obtained from Connecticut storages. He also went over the manuscript in the prepublication stage and was able to suggest certain desirable changes. When the bulletin was published, 200 copies were purchased at a very low price from the printer by arranging to get them at the time the Massachusetts supply was printed.

Doubtless other details, procedure, and problems not yet anticipated would arise in attempting to develop a more widespread cooperative preparation and publication of bulletins. It is believed, however, that the benefits to be gained are sufficiently obvious to justify an attempt to develop some such system.

